

STEPS TO WELLNESS – LESSON 9

Stop Poisoning Yourself

Who suffers most because of the highway slaughter caused by drinking drivers? This true story may give the answer.

ALCOHOL BRINGS TRAGEDY

Driving home just before midnight, Jim's headlights picked out two smashed cars just ahead. Beside the highway lay a red Jaguar, upright and not too badly damaged. The other car, a light sedan, squatted in the center of the road. Jim shuddered as he saw its crushed front and shattered windshield. A burning interior light displayed the human tragedy within the twisted mass of steel.



Jim asked his brother to take his car and hurry to the nearest telephone to call an ambulance, while he and his wife stayed to help. A young man stumbled toward them from the driver's seat of the sedan.

"My face hurts, what happened? Why did that car turn in front of us?" The boy's nose and cheek were crushed. His bloody right eye was already swelling shut.

"My father! How's my father? And our friends, the mother and her children?"

Jim's wife helped the young man lie on the grass, while Jim went to the car. Two adults were in the front seat. The middle-aged man with his seat belt still fastened sat there staring with unseeing eyes through the broken windshield. The dashboard was shoved into his face, his crushed head pressed rigidly beside the right door. Beside his body sat the young woman, her head and shoulders jerking fitfully as she struggled to breathe through mangled flesh and bone.

The children had probably been asleep in the back seat. The little girl was screaming as she inched slowly toward the open front door dragging a twisted leg, but her little face had not been scratched. The little boy lay on the floor dazed but apparently uninjured.

A sound from the red Jaguar caught Jim's attention. The driver was not screaming, gasping for breath, or staring blankly into space. No, he was slumped over in the front seat snoring. Beside him lay a small brown bottle with its contents still foaming. With only a few minor scratches he slept on, the putrid odor of beer spoiling the air. As Jim glanced at the snoring figure he involuntarily clenched his fists as he muttered, "I wonder if you have a wife, children, or a father."



As they waited for the ambulance and tried to help the children, they watched the blood drain from their young mother's face who was pinned tightly in the front seat. The young driver tried to speak in spite of the blood in his mouth.

"We were on our way home to mother. She's had a heart attack. We took our neighbors with us for a little trip. The children's daddy died three months ago. Sir, what happened? I remember the lights swerving into us. I didn't have time... Oh, how's my father?"

"It wasn't your fault. No one could have done a thing. You didn't have a chance."

When the ambulance arrived there was no hope for the young driver's father or the children's mother. Both were dead, killed by that drunken twist of a steering wheel.

The little girl finally recovered from her badly fractured leg and shoulder, but there was no mother to welcome her home from the hospital. The young driver's nose was straightened and the face scars are not too noticeable, but his father was not there to see him graduate from college.

What happened to the snoring occupant of the red Jaguar? In court he heard the judge sentence him to four years in prison for manslaughter... "Murder by motor vehicle while under the influence of alcohol." Only 21 years old, he will have the rest of his life to think about the suffering he caused that night he took several bottles of beer at the party.

ESCAPE FROM REALITY

Although legal, alcohol causes more suffering than any other drug in the world. It is the most widely used mood-changing drug in the world. People turn to alcohol for many reasons like to escape reality, to make the realities of life more tolerable, and for the chemical effect that it produces on their nervous systems.

Though a socially accepted drug, alcohol is none the less a dangerous one. Seventy five percent of all criminals have been drinking either just prior to or during the crime. Fifty percent of the fatal automobile accidents are caused by drinking drivers. Alcohol is a worldwide problem. Many areas in the cities of the United States, as well as around the world, are considered unsafe because of the crime rate associated with drinking. The unfortunate thing about the whole picture is that problem drinkers are getting younger all the time. Teenage drinking is increasing because of powerful advertising directed toward youth. That, along with social pressures and the example set by adults as a sign of "being growing up," are trapping more and more youth of today. What are the facts?

ALCOHOL IN THE BODY

1. Alcohol is a chemical that produces heat, but is not a food. It is absorbed readily from the stomach and diffuses quickly throughout the system by absorption from the blood, affecting the brain first. As a cell poison it not only irritates the stomach lining, but decreases the secretion of digestive juices. It dilates the blood vessels of the skin and decreases the ability of the heart to contract, disturbing both rhythm and function. Its uncontrolled use leads to addiction, and causes liver and brain damage.
2. Alcohol is not a stimulant, but a depressant. It may seem to stimulate because of the loud talking associated with drinking, but this is the result of depression of the normal inhibitions (restraints) of one's moderate behavior.
3. Alcohol does great damage to the brain and our mental faculties as well. It is known to paralyze judgment, hinder concentration, and impair coordination. Therefore, a person driving while under the influence of alcohol takes chances. Even one drink may permanently damage brain cells.
4. Long-term effects of alcohol on the body produce cirrhosis of the liver, gastritis, stomach ulcers and hemorrhage, and lowered resistance to diseases like pneumonia. Also because of inflammation to both the liver and the pancreas, with decreased ability to digest and absorb food, serious malnutrition may occur.
5. Alcohol abusers (alcoholics) shorten their life span by ten to twelve years.

IS A MODERATE AMOUNT HARMFUL?

"But," many say, "just a few beers will not do all that!" Listen to this recent medical study. Alcohol interferes with blood circulation through the small arteries, capillaries and veins. It causes the red blood cells to become sticky and clump together until the blood becomes a sludge. Oxygen can come to nerve cells only by way of blood.

Every cell in our body requires a constant supply of oxygen but as the level of alcohol increases, many small vessels become plugged. Neurons, the tiny "thinking" cells of the brain, require a high supply of oxygen continuously; deprived of oxygen, they stop their normal functioning. Without oxygen for three minutes they are seriously damaged, and if this persists for 15 to 20 minutes, the damage is permanent and the nerve cells die. And brain cells, unlike other cells of the body, do not multiply and cannot be replaced.

Even as little as .025 percent alcohol in the blood which may be reached by as little as one or two beers, causes this adherence of blood cells. As the concentration of alcohol in the blood increases, the blood cell wads become larger and finally plug the vessels, thus cutting off the oxygen supply to the brain cells. Why let a few drinks contribute to the loss of memory, reasoning ability, or the learning of diffi-

cult skills. Once the brain cells are destroyed they will never be replaced, which is another reason that even moderate drinking over a long period of time is so harmful.

WHO BECOME ALCOHOLICS?

There are many people who have asked, "What harm can come from an occasional social drink?" or say, "I know how much beer I can drink safely," or "I just drink to have a good time."

An unfortunate fact is that one out of every ten people who drink becomes a problem drinker or an alcoholic. There is no way to predict who is going to become that one. It may be you. A person is never safe and never free from the danger of slipping into the problem-drinking category. Out of the many confirmed alcoholics today there are very few who ever thought they would end up the way they have.



Why do people drink? The chemical effect that alcohol has on the body acts as a sedative; people are able to forget present problems, postpone unpleasant decisions, or become more relaxed at the party instead of a shy, quiet person. An alcoholic or problem drinker usually has deeper motives, such as anxiety, fear, frustration, loneliness, and despair, which alcohol "relieves." Many times these motives are not realized by the individual.

In times past, people felt that drinking was a personal or private matter. We now know that this is not true. Ours is a machine age. The cities we live in are cramped, highways are crowded. Many situations demand a split-second or immediate reaction. Your life depends on the other person who is supposed to be collected, responsible and sober, yet alcohol turns him into a deadly killer on the highway or on the back streets. Drinking is anything but a private matter.

How much is too much? After reviewing the facts, most realize that the temporary, fleeting pleasure involved in one beer is not worth the danger to himself and to others. So for health, efficiency, and happiness, it is recommended to refrain from even one drop.

THE OTHER WORLD OF DRUGS

Alcohol may be most commonly used, but it is not by itself. There is another category of drugs that is illegal in most countries, which are also taken and used for their chemical effects on the brain. These are the mind-altering drugs such as marijuana or LSD. Marijuana is a potentially dangerous drug. Although not as much is known about this drug as about alcohol or nicotine, today we have enough

facts to know that it can produce definite psychological effects on the brain such as impaired judgment, created illusions, distortion as to time and distance, and psychosis.

There is no benefit from a drug that alters the mind, the judgment, the temperament, and the inhibitions, and impairs the ability to operate a car.

The most important effect of marijuana is that frequently the user, after having become accustomed to it, desires a stronger "kick," a stronger dose, so the addiction may easily escalate to other stronger drugs.

Marijuana is very unpredictable in its effect on the body. One young woman stated that after smoking it she experienced "horror." She described this as a feeling of indescribable evil. One young man stated that after smoking more than his usual amount, he became disoriented as to time and place, could not think, and had difficulty controlling his limbs. For some weeks thereafter he experienced hallucinations or dreams or nightmares resembling those he had during the reaction. Others have been known to jump to their death from a high-rise building because of these reactions.

The most addicting drug in the world today is heroin. People have been known to become addicted after just one or two doses. Heroin and morphine are derivatives of opium and are powerful brain depressants. Heroin produces a dreamlike state of elation in a person, and the addiction is so intense that people addicted to this poison will go to any length, commit any crime, to obtain money for the next dose.

A BETTER WAY THAN DRUG USE

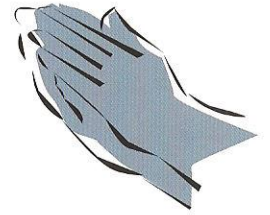
What are the reasons for using illegal addicting drugs? For some it may be curiosity, school failure, peer pressure, boredom, or the desire to "live dangerously." Drug dependence, whether it involves alcohol, marijuana, nicotine, LSD, or heroin is against your best interests. It damages your health, your thinking ability, decreases your sensitivity to spiritual influences, and reduces your freedom. You live only to satisfy self.

Instead, choose a happy, balanced program of work, rest, and play, putting others before yourself. The challenge of life is learning to overcome difficulties, not escape them through drugs. Many of the deeper, lasting values of life are gained through failure, disappointment, and depressing circumstances.

Parents can help themselves as well as the young people when they devote time to their children, share their problems and interests, do things together with them. Be sure to give them love and security. When they want to communicate, always take time to listen. Also provide activities that will channel their youthful energy and

creativity into right paths. Involvement in community centers, youth organizations, sports, useful work, wholesome recreational activities, and nature study leaves little time for the entry of drugs!

But even material, educational, cultural, and recreational activities are insufficient to meet the total needs of man. You need something higher and deeper that will provide ultimate and enduring fulfillment in living. The abundant life that Jesus Christ offers has no need for drug dependence. With Christ, your spiritual values and concern for others can give you complete stability and protection against the snare of drugs.



REVIEW QUESTIONS

T F (True or False)

- 1. Drinking is the cause of a large share of the automobile accidents.
- 2. Alcohol is the most widely used mood-changing drug in the world.
- 3. Trying to escape life's problems through drugs really adds to life's problems.
- 4. Alcohol is a food that aids nutrition.
- 5. Alcohol has no effect upon a user's life span.
- 6. The brain is the first part of the body which alcohol affects.
- 7. Not only does alcohol affect the brain, but it damages the heart, stomach, and liver.
- 8. Even a few bottles of beer can destroy brain cells.
- 9. Any person who drinks could become a problem drinker or an alcoholic.
- 10. Most people who have become dependent on drugs can easily stop using them any time they wish.
- 11. Since marijuana is not addictive, it is not a dangerous drug.
- 12. Marijuana leads to the use of stronger drugs.
- 13. Heroin can cause addiction after just one or two doses.
- 14. The basic reason for using drugs is selfishness.
- 15. The abundant life Jesus Christ offers has no need for drug dependence.